

Tension, Structure and Philosophical Implications of the Cebuano *Balak* (Poems)

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Abstract—The paper is a descriptive analysis of the selected poems of a Cebuano poet. The researcher hopes to provide a deeper understanding and a more thorough appreciation of Cebuano vernacular literature specially the Cebuano poetic genre (*balak*). This work will provide would-be scholars and critics of Philippine vernacular literature some valuable materials in Cebuano vernacular. The researcher further believes that no matter how fragmentary or piecemeal the information about the subject-author of this study, it is important to document it. For it is out of attempts such as this--to humanize the literary work by identifying the provenance of the literary piece and its link with the writer's life and other works, that the dearth of information in the academic studies of vernacular writings can be at least supplanted.

Keywords— Balak, Cebuano Poetry, Tension, Structure.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is really pathetic that one who had been through a college education had been conditioned to think that interest in one's vernacular literature and culture is a highly specialized preoccupation reserved only for a few masters and even fewer doctoral students.

The study or research on vernacular literature is, according to Lumbera (as cited by dela Torre, 1998) "a territory where the light is fitful and the maps fragmentary." [1] Thanks, however, to the emerging process of decolonization, which led the few nationalist movement to examine into the dynamics of cultural relations between the Philippines and its past colonial masters. This sense of nationalism is reinforced by the new policy implemented by the Department of Education in the Philippines through its order of incorporating vernacular literature in the so called Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education(MTBMLE) policy. The resulting reawakening of the previously neglected native tradition has led to a fresh and enlightened appreciation of the attempts of vernacular writers to assert through their works a vision of their society and its future. [1]

Today, there is little more light and the maps are little more reliable. And although the terrain is still as rugged as ever, the author of this research took the road less travelled by -- the study of vernacular literature, particularly the Cebuano poetic genre (*balak*) written by a less known Cebuano poet, Estefanio A. Luceño. The researcher believes that in today's pioneer-years of vernacular literature, many literary works are still waiting to be collected, classified and then analyzed. In the

words of Mojares, "the vastness and richness of Cebuano literature deserves in-depth studies, however, this art form has long waited for recognition but in vain." [2]

II. PROCEDURE

- A. Descriptive analysis is employed both in analyzing the tension, the structure and the philosophical implications the poems suggest.
- B. The analysis of the structure is based on the poetic dictum of the subject-poet's days which was advanced by Osorio in his book, "Unsa-on Pagsulat mga Balak," (How to Write Poetry) which was later known as the Cebuano prosody.
- C. Discussion of the philosophical implications makes use of the theory presented by Villarino in his papers at the Symposium on Sugbuanon Literature at U.P. Diliman.
- D. The author also conducted personal interviews with the subject-poet, his wife, children, friends and colleagues. These interviews were of great help in the in-depth understanding of the poems, specifically on the aspect of their philosophical implications.

III. MAJOR FINDINGS

The *elements of tension* found in the selected poems of the subject-author in terms of the following literary criteria: repetition of sound and sense; contrast and comparison of parts with other parts or with the whole; and interfusion of sense and feeling into each parts are as follows:

Generally, the sound of *a*, *an*, and *ang* are often repeated which is in fact the dominant sound in the Cebuano vernacular. The sounds of these letters were either used in his poems as assonance or alliteration. Consonance and onomatopoeic sounds were also employed to vividly portray the images the poet intends. The sound of the consonants *g* and *k* were also dominant in the poems.

Also repeated meanings of words are dominant, in order to firmly drive the intent. Some words were repeated exactly, such as *wala* and *ayaw*, usually employed in the initial of verses to create an imperative tone.

Comparison and contrast created the tension in the *analogy* method frequently used in the poems. Contrast was specifically effective in the poems following the inductive and deductive reasoning processes. The use of metaphors heightened both comparison and contrast as techniques.

The poet employed interfusion of sense and feeling through

the tones and modes created either by the words, the lines, and the stanzas or by the poem as a whole. Generally the feelings created ranged from melancholy to euphoria, typical emotions evoked by such saintly preoccupations, as preparing for end of the world and achieving heavenly glory.

Structures found in the selected poems are from the following literary criteria: meter, rhyme and rhythm; and figures of speech.

The poet strictly speaking, *did not follow the structure* advocated by Osorio [3] and Villarino, although a number of poems studied might qualify for the Cebuano prosody. The greater number was product of the creative attempt of the poet in terms of experimentation in versifications. The meters were generally *amphibrach tetrameter*.

The number of syllables and its specified stress on each line were generally outside of Osorio's prosody.

The rhymed lines in the poems were either *rima perfecta* or *imperfecta*. The rhymed schemes were extensive and varied.

The poet used figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor and personification.

Philosophical implications of the Cebuano *balak* are derived from the day-to-day life of the Cebuanos in particular and the Filipinos in general.

Generally, traces of *Christian moralism* can be drawn out from all of the poems being studied. Christian Moralism was reflected in all the poems being studied either as direct or as implied principles of conduct between what is right and what is wrong, based on the two great commandments of the Christian religion.

The poet mantled Christian moralism with the philosophy called *anti-intellectualism*. Traces of *humanism*, as a philosophy, were evident in the poems. His *moral didacticism* sprung from his personal experience and insights on moral decadence, thus advocating moral reformation. The poet employed *subjectivism* as a way of moralizing. by evidently stating objective truths but always with implied ethical imperatives.

IV. CONCLUSION

Generally, repetition or reiteration of both sound and sense were employed in the selected *balak*.

The structures of his poems were also varied maybe because of his creativity or experimentation with versifications. His metaphors were varied often associated with his choice of theme.

Traces of Christian Moralism mantled with anti-intellectualism and humanism, very often expressed through subjectivism can be inferred from the poems.

The subject-poet is an enduring poet of his time who contributed largely to the development of Cebuano vernacular literature, specially the poetic genre (*balak*). His works have been found out to reflect his life and the life of his own people, their customs and traditions as a believing community and the problems that plague their society.

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Frederick P. Grengia is a natural born Cebuano .He hails from a family of “ magbabalak .” His poetic inclination must have been influenced by his deceased poet- grandfather, *Tatay Ano*, who has created a number of *balaks* but never had the chance to publish his works.

The author finished his Artium Baccalaureus (AB) in English and Philosophy at San Carlos Seminary College, Cebu City in 1995. He earned his Master of Arts in Education major in English at Saint Columban College, Pagadian City in 2000.He had been in the teaching profession for almost fifteen years either as permanent instructor or as visiting lecturer. At present, he working on his final dissertation writing for his Doctorate in Education in Southern Mindanao Colleges. The author is a College Instructor designated as the Executive Assistant to the Office of the J.H. Cerilles State College President. Aside from his administrative function, he also teaches language, literature, social sciences and philosophy subjects both in the undergraduate and graduate schools of JHCSC in Mati,San Miguel, Zamboanga del Sur.

He intends to publish his first collection of *Balak* and his first book in *Logic* next year.